

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
NONPROVISIONAL PATENT APPLICATION

Title: CONDIMENT CONTAINER HOLDER

Inventor: Samuel S. FIELDS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/461,596, filed on April 9, 2003, entitled CONDIMENT CONTAINER HOLDER.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to condiment containers. More particularly, the present invention is directed towards a condiment container holder that can accommodate a variety of condiments provided by a typical fast-food restaurant.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Many people today consume fast foods and snacks in their cars. In such circumstances, people often find it difficult to spice up their food with condiments without making a mess. For instance, vehicle occupants typically

find it difficult to eat French fries with ketchup in their vehicles, because they lack the room to spread out the fries and dip them in ketchup. This is especially so in today's smaller, fuel-efficient cars which tend to have less space between the driver and passenger seats.

Hence, vehicle occupants typically squirt the condiment (e.g., ketchup) on top of the food (e.g., fries) while the food is still in its container. This does not spread the condiment evenly, and often results in messy fingers and hands because the consumer has to grab the food by the end that is covered with the condiment. The food that is covered with the condiment can also spill, and this causes a mess in the car and on the consumer's clothes. Additionally, these condiment packages often cost in excess of ten cents per unit, thereby resulting in significant costs for the surplus of units often provided to a customer via a drive-up window.

Vehicle occupants can also squirt the condiment on a detached surface, such as a spare piece of paper or wrapping. But, in this situation, the condiment is in jeopardy of creating a messy spill (e.g., creating a spill due to sudden deceleration or movement of the vehicle). Box-type packages (such as those used for containing sweet

& sour, honey mustard, barbecue, or ranch dip) can be similarly unstable if they are not affixed to a surface.

Each of these problems can also serve to distract the driver and thereby lead to an accident. Moreover, these problems are more serious for the driver, who has at most one hand to manage the food and the condiments. Some drivers at times attempt to hold an open condiment package against the steering wheel with the one hand, while dipping food items with the other hand. This all-too-common practice severely impedes the driver's ability to steer the vehicle and can cause a spill.

Vehicle drivers and passengers often reluctantly avoid using condiments or avoid ordering food that they prefer to eat with condiments as a result of these problems. To address this need, rigid special-purpose apparatuses (such as the devices disclosed in U.S. Pat. 5,667,119) have been proposed. These apparatuses attach to the car to hold the food and condiments. It would be impractical, however, for food vendors to distribute such apparatuses with each sale due to their material cost. In addition, these apparatuses would probably need to be attached to a window (because it is unlikely that consumers would permanently attach the apparatus in another location of their vehicles); however, such an attachment would block the driver's vision.

Some have also proposed food containers with attached condiment containers (see, e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 5,429,262). However, such a solution would require that the consumer maintain the food container in a constant upright position to prevent the condiment from spilling. Keeping the food container in an upright position while driving is not always possible. This is especially so if the condiment container makes the food container unstable. Such a device might also require a new type of food container.

At present, there is no practical disposable condiment package that the fast food vendors can distribute to avoid these problems. The present invention provides a portable condiment container holder that solves the problems faced by vehicle occupants who wish to eat while they are in their vehicles. The invention also provides a feasible solution for easily attaching condiments to a variety of surfaces, including vertical and horizontal surfaces. Additionally, the preferred embodiment of the present invention is constructed low-cost materials and formed by efficient cost-effective processes so that consumers and suppliers in the price sensitive fast-food market may utilize the portable condiment container holder.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention eliminates the above-mentioned needs for a portable condiment container holder also provides a feasible solution for easily attaching condiments to a variety of surfaces, including vertical and horizontal surfaces.

In accordance with the present invention, there is provided a condiment container holder including a plurality of walls, each wall of the plurality of walls having a top lip on an upper portion thereof, a bottom operatively engaged to the plurality of walls, the bottom having a bottom lips on each end portion thereof, and the bottom having a condiment well formed therein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 is an isometric view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 2 is a top view of the present invention illustrated in FIGURE 1.

FIGURE 3 is a front view of the present invention illustrated in FIGURE 2.

FIGURE 4 is a bottom view of the present invention illustrated in FIGURE 3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to Figs. 1 and 2, a preferred embodiment of the present invention is illustrated a condiment container holder 10. Condiment container holder 10 includes a first wall 12, a second wall 14 and a bottom 26 to form a partial enclosure for a condiment or condiment container.

First wall 12 and second wall 14 incorporate lips, first top lip 16 and second top lip 18, respectively, at their upper regions. First top lip 16 and second top lip 18 form the upper boundary for a condiment container, preventing the condiment container from escaping upwards if condiment container holder 10 is jarred.

Bottom 24 also incorporates lips, first bottom lip 20 and second bottom lip 22, respectively, at its end regions. First bottom lip 20 and second bottom lip 22 form the lateral boundaries for a condiment container, preventing the condiment container from escaping sideways if condiment container holder 10 is jarred.

As shown in Figs. 1-3, bottom 24 further includes condiment well 26. Condiment well 26 can be used for containing a direct application of a condiment, such as ketchup, mustard, barbecue sauce, or the like. Since

condiment well 26 is formed as a recess in bottom 24, liquid condiments can be adequately contained.

Additionally, as illustrated in Fig. 4, a releasable adhesive material 28 can be affixed to bottom 24. Alternatively, releasable adhesive material 28 can be affixed to either first wall 12 or second wall 14. Releasable adhesive material 28 permits the user of condiment container holder 10 to temporarily affix condiment container 10 to a surface, such as a vehicle console. This allows the user to position container holder 10 in the most useful position.

In operation, the user will affix condiment container 10 in her vehicle using releasable adhesive material 28. Once condiment container holder 10 is placed into position, the user can insert at least one condiment container between first wall 12, second wall 14 and bottom 24. The at least one condiment container is maintained within condiment container 10 by first top lip 16, second top lip 18, first bottom lip 20, and second bottom lip 22. Alternatively, the user can forego the use of condiment containers and directly apply liquid condiments in condiment well 26.

Although only a few exemplary embodiments of the present invention have been described in detail in the

following Figures, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that numerous modifications to the exemplary embodiments are possible without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of this invention. Accordingly, all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of this invention as defined in the appended claims.